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ABSTRACT

Various sources of learner problems are identified and specific remedial activities are suggested for difficulties in speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary acquisition, and grammar tasks. Some of the more common sources of learner difficulties that are discussed are: poor memory, lack of flexibility, too impulsive, too reflective, field dependent, broad categorizer, narrow categorizer, and low tolerance of ambiguity. Remedial activities designed to address these problems are discussed. Twenty activities emphasize the development of analytical skills, nine activities concentrate on the synthesis of information, 17 activities concentrate on increasing flexibility with the language, and three activities address making inferences. These remedial activities are easily adaptable to individual tutorial sessions, small-group work, or large-group instruction. In the latter case, teachers may choose to identify particular problems and incorporate appropriate activities into daily lesson plans. A grid is presented indicating appropriate remedial activities for each learner problem (e.g., poor memory) and each learning task (e.g., listening). (SW)

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DIAGNOSING AND RESPONDING TO INDIVIDUAL LEARNER NEEDS

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*Diagnosing and Responding to Individual Learner Needs**

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AMERICAN educators have become increasingly aware of the importance of developing a curriculum that responds to the interests and needs of individual students. The foreign language profession shares this concern. Recent articles, both theoretical and practical, have focused on various aspects of individual differences. Students come to the second-language classroom with different interests and preferences, different first-language skills, and different learning styles in both the affective and cognitive domains. We know that students adopt their own learning strategies as they perform second-language tasks. We also know that a particular strategy may be ineffective or inefficient, and, as a result, students experience difficulties in various skill areas.

There are many ways in which teachers can respond to the learning needs of individual students. First, one can identify a general cognitive style or strategy (such as auditory or visual orientation) that a person prefers and design activities in all skill areas to accommodate that style. Secondly, the structure of the learning environ-

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ment can be altered to accommodate the learning preferences or styles of the student. (For example, some students funct[illegible] better in a structured environment, w[illegible]ers prefer an unstructured classroom sett[illegible]g.) Another way to alter the learning environment is to provide opportunities for either small-group or large-group instruction, depending on the student's preference.

The purpose of this article is to present a third approach—an approach that seeks to identify and label the particular learning problem rather than the individual learner. A student may employ different learning strategies as task demands change. For example, one student may be reflective in a writing task but impulsive in a listening exercise. Another student may lack flexibility and be unable to paraphrase in speaking but may approach a reading task with a great deal of flexibility. Still another learner may tolerate ambiguity while reading, but is easily frustrated by unknown elements in a listening task.

In this article, various sources of learner problems are identified and specific remedial activities are suggested for difficulties in speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary acquisition, and grammar tasks. Some of the more common sources of learner difficulties are discussed below:[1]

Some Learner Problems

Poor Memory

Students cannot remember information long enough to integrate the different elements of a spoken or written message into a meaningful and coherent whole. In addition, they may have difficulty recalling specific vocabulary, verb endings, noun markers, and the like.

Lack of Flexibility

Students hesitate, stumble over words, and are not able to find alternative means of expression. The performance of such students is often characterized by pauses in speech and by skimpy or brief compositions. They may be what Guilford (1967) calls convergent thinkers, i.e., they tend to remain within the strict limitations of a task or to focus on the production of a single right answer.

Too Impulsive

Impulsive students are generally characterized by a tendency to jump into a task without considering its various components. They are not attentive to detail, and do not know how to or are not willing to take the time to identify the distinctive or salient features of a learning task or segment of language. They may lack organizational skills. Impulsive students are not overly concerned with the adequacy or accuracy of a response and will often give the first answer they think of.

Too Reflective

Reflective learners are too attentive to detail and discriminate so finely that they lose the general thread of a listening or reading passage. They are overly concerned with the adequacy or accuracy of their responses and may give too much thought to alternatives before coming to a decision.

Field Dependent

Students lack focusing skills, are too easily distracted by detail, and cannot distinguish relevant from irrelevant information. Field dependent students are easily frustrated by extraneous information and therefore are likely to make a task more complex than necessary.

Broad Categorizer

Broad categorizers have difficulty in making pertinent distinctions between categories. They tend to overgeneralize, making rules about the second language that subsume many examples.

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[1]Good summaries of learner problems appear in Hosenfeld (1975) and Speery (1972).

Narrow Categorizer

These learners tend to create a rule for every example, a strategy that detracts from their ability to make necessary and accurate generalizations. Consequently, they are often lost in detail and have difficulty in forming concepts.

Low Tolerance of Ambiguity

These students give up quickly when the task presents difficulty, doubt, or ambiguity. They cannot hypothesize well and do not like to take risks.

Suggested Activities

Remedial activities designed to address these problems in specific skill areas appear in the grid on page 344. These remedial activities are easily adaptable to individual tutorial sessions, small-group work, or large-group instruction. In the latter case, teachers may choose to identify particular problems and incorporate appropriate activities into daily lesson plans. Numbers in the grid refer to specific activities within a given skill area. (For example, activities 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 14, 19, 21, 22, and 23 can be used to help students who are *field dependent* when doing *listening tasks*.) Activities have also been classified according to the processing demands of the task and are listed below within these classifications. For example, activities 1-20 emphasize the development of analytical skills; tasks 21-29 concentrate on the synthesis of information, etc.

I. *ANALYSIS:* Activities that require the student to analyze samples of the foreign language—phonemes, morphemes, vocabulary items, etc. Analytical tasks might also include judging the meaningfulness of a given sample of the foreign language.
   A. *CLUE SEARCHING:* Tasks requiring the student to locate certain features of the language and identify them properly.
      1. *Skimming Tasks:* Such tasks involve the rapid reading of a paragraph to obtain information pertaining to a specific idea. Students are given a list of specific questions to be answered in a given amount of time. (Based on Rivers)
      2. *Syntactic Clue Searching:* Students underline or tally morphemes of a certain category (such as verb endings, noun markers, and the like) in either a reading or listening passage. (Based on Minn)

         In the following passage, for example, students might be asked to tally all occurrences of the demonstrative adjective:

         Yo estoy en la universidad; estoy en una aula de la universidad. Esta aula es moderna y cómoda. La clase de español es en esta aula. Este joven es un estudiante. Es norteamericano. Se llama Daniel. Está al lado de la puerta, a la derecha. El cuaderno del joven está en la mesa. La cartera del estudiante está debajo de la silla. (Barcia)
      3. *Semantic Clue Searching:* This task involves underlining or tallying lexical items of a given category (such as descriptive adjectives, adverbs of time and place, medical terms, terms pertaining to education, foods, humor, etc.) (Minn, pp. 93-100).

         In the following passage in French, for example, students tally all adjectives denoting colors:

         Je viens d'acheter une nouvelle voiture—elle est rouge avec des sièges blancs et noirs et un tapis rouge. Elle n'est pas chère mais c'est une voiture rapide et confortable.
      4. *Information Search:* This activity involves reading or listening to a passage with certain preposed questions in mind. Students may be asked to identify the foreign language equivalent of an English word or to find an answer to a specific question.

         For example, students listen to the following passage and try to identify the word equivalent to "departments" in French universities:

         Aujourd'hui c'est samedi. Jacques Marchand n'a pas de cours à l'université. Avec sa cousine, Françoise

Laroux, il se promène au Quartier Latin. Le Quartier Latin est le quartier des étudiants. Il y a plusieurs facultés de l'université de Paris. Des Grandes Ecoles comme l'Ecole Polytechnique et l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts et beaucoup de lycées . . . (Valdman).

5. *Who Said?* Learners indicate which character from a reading passage made a particular statement. As a follow-up activity, they can be asked to find sentences or words from the reading that support their choices.
6. *Reverse Semantic Cloze:* Students are given a passage in which extraneous words have been inserted. Their task is to cross out the words that do not belong.

   You are looking for some work and you find an apple announcement near in the newspaper. This ad tells you to write to the personnel umbrella department . . .
7. *Corrigez-moi:* A story, paragraph, or sentence containing inappropriate words whose meanings could be confused with the appropriate contextual meaning is read. As students listen they are asked to notice the inappropriate word and suggest a substitution (Rivers).

   I put on my sleep. (slip)

   In my living room I have a lamp, a sofa, and two green armpits. (armchairs)

   Ce matin, j'ai très femme. (faim)

   ¿Dónde está Pablo? Está en su cartero. (cuarto)

B. *CATEGORIZING/CLUSTERING:* Tasks requiring the student to list or otherwise isolate items of a certain grammatical or semantic category.

8. *Category Listing:* Students create a list of words belonging to a given category (such as words that pertain to sports, a list of fruits or vegetables, a list of items in the classroom that could be put in a suitcase, etc.).
9. *Card Sorting:* Vocabulary words written on notecards are sorted according to the category to which they belong, such as sports, clothing, foods. A given category can also be further subdivided, such as team versus individual sports, summer versus winter clothing, etc.
10. *Find Odd Word:* A short list of vocabulary words is given to the learner. All the words are related except one. The student's task is to indicate which word does not belong on the list.

nature	les sports	madre
sunshine	le football	padre
authority	le tennis	criada
camping	l'hôtel	hermano

11. *Blank is to Blank:* Pairs of words that are related in some way (such as antonyms, synonyms, superordinates, etc.) are used in this activity. A third word is given and students are asked to find an appropriate match.

    Tooth: Dentist Hair:_____
    (Barber)
12. *Error Categorizing:* After the teacher has returned a corrected composition, students are asked to list their mistakes, putting them into categories such as spelling errors, tense errors, vocabulary mistakes, etc.
13. *Discrimination Tasks:* Students pick the correct word from a list of words that are similar in form or meaning.

    I went to the _____.
    a. widow
    b. window
    c. winding
    d. willow
14. *Segmenting:* This activity involves listening to sentences and isolating their component parts. The task may be to identify the actor in each sentence, the object, or the action. At a more advanced level, learners may be required to identify main or subordinate clauses, such as relative or conditional clauses.

    The girl who is standing by the window is my sister.

The little old lady in tennis shoes was bitten by a big dog.

C. *MEANINGFULNESS JUDGMENT/PROCESSING:* Tasks requiring the student to judge the meaningfulness or acceptability of an utterance in the foreign language, express an opinion, or evaluate a series of statements.

15. *Sentence Sense:* In this activity the student's task is to judge whether a sentence is meaningful. If the sentence is not meaningful, the student changes it so that it makes sense.

The old man sat quietly on the ceiling.

The loudly person made a lot of noise.

16. *Ranking:* Students are given a list of related vocabulary words (such as a list of foods, animals, gifts, etc.) and are asked to rank them according to their personal preferences.

17. *Either-Or Questions:* In this activity, the class is given questions to which two or three alternative answers are provided. Their task is to choose one of the alternatives in answering each question.

18. *Agree/Disagree:* Students are asked to agree or disagree with a given statement. If they disagree, they reword the statement so that it represents their own ideas.

D. *GENERAL ANALYTICAL TASKS:* Tasks incorporating all of the above categories.

19. *Making up Questions:* After reading or listening to a passage, class members make up questions pertaining to the content.

20. *Dictation:* Students write sentences dictated to them by the teacher. The sentences may also be on tape.

II. *SYNTHESIS:* Activities requiring the student to go beyond analysis to recombine elements of the language and create an organized whole. Includes activities such as résumés and organizational tasks.

21. *Résumé: Second Language:* Using a list of sentences provided by the teacher, students choose those that best summarize a reading or listening passage.

22. *Résumé in English:* After reading or listening to a passage in the second language, the class members write a short résumé of the content in English.

23. *Create a Title:* Learners are given several titles from which they choose the one that best summarizes the reading or listening passage. They can also be asked to create a title or titles on their own, or write a short moral to a story in the second language.

24. *Strip Story:* Each student in a small group of four or five is given a sentence from a story. They are asked to memorize the sentence without letting anyone else see it. Each student tells the group his sentence as quickly as possible (Gilson).

25. *Sentence Builder:* This task involves creating sentences by combining words or phrases from different columns.

A bas	la société
Arrêtez	les cigarettes
Cherchez	la guerre
Faites	le sexe
Toujours	les femmes
Demandez	l'amour
•	•
•	•
•	•
?	?

26. *Embedding:* Students are given a short sentence and asked in turn to add clauses, adjectives, adverbs, etc., to the sentence, making it progressively longer.

The woman is blond.

The woman who is standing over there is blond.

The woman who is standing over there by the window is blond.

The woman who is standing over there by the window that is open is blond.

27. *Scrambled Sentences:* In this task, scrambled sentences must be re-ordered into their normal syntactic order.

28. *Dehydrated Sentences:* Students are given parts of a sentence and are asked to fill out the rest of it, adding proper function words, verb endings, etc.

29. *Scrambled Composition:* This task is much like "Scrambled Sentences," but whole sentences, not words, need to be re-ordered into a meaningful and coherent paragraph. The paragraph can be based on a story already read or a recombination of words and structures with which the students are familiar. Student compositions can also be used for this activity.

III. *FLEXIBILITY:* Tasks requiring the student to find equivalencies, think of paraphrases, expand upon a cue or an idea, or make transformations. They should help students increase their flexibility with the language and thereby increase fluency.

30. *Making Contradictions:* Students respond to a statement by making contradictory statements.

Teacher: "Cinderella's childhood was happy."

Student 1: "No, it was very unhappy."

Student 2: "She had to do all the hard work."

(Stanislawczyk and Yavener, p. 25)

31. *Semantic Matching:* In Column A, a set of sentences is given; equivalent or near-equivalent sentences are then chosen from Column B.

Column A

1. I hate cooking.
2. You don't have any tact.
3. Do you like Montreal?
4. He doesn't have any money.

Column B

a. Is life in Montreal pleasant?
b. He's not rich.
c. I don't like to prepare dinner.
d. He's not very diplomatic.

32. *Syntactic Matching:* This activity is very similar to the one described above except that the focus is on grammatical transformations.

The dog bit the cat.

The cat was bitten by the dog.

33. *Oral Semantic Matching:* In this activity Student A has a list of sentences which he reads to his partner. The partner has a list of sentences equivalent in meaning but arranged in a different order. As Student A reads his sentences, Student B reads aloud the sentence on his list with the equivalent meaning.

34. *Retell:* Students take a message either in person or on the phone for someone else. Their task is to transmit that message as accurately as possible to a third party.

35. *Cartes de conversation:* Pairs of learners ask each other questions listed on a conversation or interview card (Bonin and Birckbichler).

Ask your partner Card 1
what sport he/she likes
if he/she plays basketball
if he/she prefers skiing or golf
if he/she plays tennis

Ask your partner Card 2
if he/she is athletic
if he/she likes basketball
if he/she plays golf
if he/she prefers tennis or football

36. *Completion:* Students complete in a meaningful way a sentence or a paragraph.

E.g.,

When I'm tired, I _____.
When I'm afraid, I _____.
I am ashamed when I _____.

37. *Transformation Drills:* Gram-

matical exercises that ask students to make transformations, substitutions, and the like can be assigned to students working alone or in groups.

38. *Question Expansion:* Given a question (e.g., "Do you like sports?"), class members create additional questions relating to the same topic. (E.g., "What's your favorite sport? Do you like to watch sports on T.V.? Do you prefer team or individual sports?")
39. *Creating with Visuals:* Learners create original captions for a series of visuals from a magazine or cartoon strip. They might also be asked to create a composition based on a series of visuals or cartoons.
40. *Vocabulary: Create a Context:* Students are given a short list of idioms or vocabulary and create an original story or paragraph using all the words on the list. They may do this task alone or in a group.
41. *Rose Technique:* Class members are placed in pairs or in larger groups. Each student has a blank piece of paper. He listens to his partner or the group leader who has a picture to describe (the teacher can provide the picture or students can choose their own). As his partner describes the picture, the student tries to draw a rough duplicate according to the description he hears (Boylan and Omaggio; adapted from Rose, Suzanne et al.).
42. *Group Brainstorming:* Students are given statements and are asked to find as many ways to express the same idea in different words.

    E.g.,

    Teacher: Ernst is unhappy today.

    Student 1: He is miserable.

    Student 2: He is not happy.

    Student 3: He is sad.

    Student 4: He is not ecstatic.

    etc.
43. *Jigsaw Puzzles:* Groups of four or five learners are given cards, each with a word on it. Each person describes his word in the foreign language to the others in the group without actually using it. When all students have described their word successfully, the students take the first letter of each and see what new word the letters spell out. (Puzzle parts might also depict objects in a room; in this case, when all the words have been guessed, the group decides which room of the house has been described.) (Omaggio)
44. *Be Wordy:* A topic sentence or a series of topic sentences is given and class members fill out the rest of the paragraph.
45. *Cue Insertion:* Students expand each sentence of their original compositions by adding information. (For example, they can expand the information that is already in the paragraph, or add descriptive words.) The teacher may want to insert appropriate cue words within the text of the composition to serve as a guide.
46. *Translation:* Sentences or paragraphs are translated from the native language into the second language or vice-versa.

IV. *MAKING INFERENCES:* Tasks requiring the student to analyze and synthesize information to make inferences about what a missing cue would be or what conclusions can be drawn from certain information.

47. *Cloze Adaptation:* Students fill in the blanks of a paragraph by choosing from given options or by providing appropriate words.
48. *Contextual Guessing:* A paragraph in which new vocabulary words have been underlined is provided. Learners must try to guess the meaning of each new

Source of Problem or Need	Learning Task					
	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Vocabulary	Grammar
Poor Memory	2,3,4,5,14, 19,21,22,24, 41, 54, 55, 56	8,17,18,34, 35,36,54,55	2,3,4,5,19, 21,22,41,56	8,34,36,54	3,8,9,10,36, 47,55	2,14,34,36, 47,55
Lack of Flexibility	31,32,41, 48,50	25,26,30,33, 34,38,39,40, 41,42,43,44, 45,50	1,31,32, 47,48,50	25,26,30, 34,36,38 39,40,41 42,44,45,50	8,25,31, 33,36,40 42,43,48	25,32,34,36
Too Impulsive	2,3,4,5,7, 13,14,15 19, 20,21,22,49, 51,52	7,12,17 18,34,35,41, 53,54	2,3,4,5, 6,7,13,15 16,19,21, 22,29,49, 51,52	7,17,18, 20,27,28, 29,41,46, 53	3,6,7,9,10, 13,15,16, 21,28,46, 49,52,53	2,6,13,15, 16,17,27, 28,46
Too Reflective	4,23,31, 32,47,48	25,33,42, 44	1,4,23,31, 32,47,48	25,42,44	25,31,33, 42,47,48	25,32,34,47
Field Dependent	2,3,4,5,7, 14,19,21,22, 23		1,2,3,4,5, 6,7,14,21, 22,23,47,48		1,3,4,7, 47,48	1,2,6,7, 14,47,48
Broad Categorizer	2,3,4,7,10, 11,13,15	7,8,12	2,3,6,9, 10,11,13,15	12,20,28	3,6,7,8,9, 10,11,13,15	2,6,8,11, 12,13,15
Narrow Categorizer	2,3,10,31, 32	8,33,42	2,3,9,10, 31,32	31,32	8,31,33	32
Low Tolerance of Ambiguity	4,15,47,48	25,33,42	1,4,15, 47,48	25,33,42	25,33,42, 47,48	32,47

4) *Specificity of Purpose.* Teachers can identify with greater specificity the purpose and cognitive demands of any task they decide to assign to individual learners. When task demands are clearly identified, the activities can be assigned to those students who need them the most.

Our profession has been saying for some time that we must respond to the needs and preferences of the individual learner. These suggestions constitute one viable, practical way to achieve this very important goal.

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word from the context. A related activity uses nonsense words instead of new vocabulary. The student must find the nonsense words and replace them with appropriate vocabulary.

The old man sitting on the drutz was eating a banana. He dropped the grutchen on the floor. When he got up, he gropped on the grutchen and broke his frimpus. He couldn't snarkle for weeks!

49. *Identifying Visuals:* Students are asked to identify an object or scene orally or in writing by choosing the appropriate visual from a selection of 3 or 4 pictures. They may also put visuals in the proper order based on a paragraph that they read or hear.
50. *Style Shifting:* After reading or listening to a short dialogue from which the names of the characters have been deleted, students identify who the speakers might have been, basing their decisions on the style of the person's speech. They might also create such dialogues orally or in writing. (Based on Jacobsen.)
51. *Inferential Identification:* This task asks the learner to identify which character from a dialogue, short story, play, etc., might have made a statement. The actual statement is not made in the original text but is reflective of the character's personality.
52. *Logical Continuation: Receptive:* Students are given a pair of sentences either orally or in writing and are asked to indicate whether or not the second sentence follows logically from the first.

    John never goes out on weeknights.

    He went to the movies Tuesday.

53. *Logical Continuation: Productive:* After reading a statement or a paragraph each learner then produces a sentence that logically follows.

V. *IMPROVING MEMORY:* Tasks designed to help the student expand his capacities for remembering words, phrases, sentences, ideas in the foreign language.

54. *Remembering Responses:* After students have answered a series of personalized questions based on the themes and structures of the lesson, members of the class are asked to recall some of the responses that were given.
55. *Memory Games:* Memory games can focus on vocabulary or structures. Typical memory games include chain sentences or stories, whisper-down-the-lane (or "telephone"), etc.
56. *Did You Hear?* Students listen to a short narrative. They then hear a series of sentences, some of which were in the text. Their task is to separate the sentences they heard from ones they did not hear.

Summary

There are various advantages to the approach described in this article. Some of the most important ones are listed below:

1) *Adaptability.* Activities can be used for individual, small-group and large-group instruction in structured or less-structured settings.
2) *Ease of Preparation.* With relatively few changes, existing textbook exercises, reading passages, and dialogues can be adapted for remedial purposes using the activity models described above.
3) *Manageability.* The same materials can be used as a basis for a wide variety of learning activities that respond to the differing needs of students in the classroom. For example, the student who is an impulsive reader can search for specific cues in a reading passage while another student who has trouble reading rapidly can skim the same passage for the general idea.

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